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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: MISSION HOLDS SUCCESSFUL OUTREACH ON BIOTECH

**¶11.** (SBU) Introduction and Summary. Mission Nigeria hosted U.S. Speaker Gary Blumenthal August 31-September 4 for a successful biotechnology outreach in Ibadan, Lagos, and Abuja. Over 200 scientists, government officials, representatives of civil society, and the media participated in the program and learned about recent developments in biotechnology applications. The Mission helped form a GON interagency Coordinating Committee to facilitate the passage of a draft bill on biosafety, currently before the National Assembly. The outreach program received wide and positive media coverage. End Introduction and Summary.

Engaging Academics and Researchers in Ibadan

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**¶12.** (SBU) Over 40 leading Nigerian academics listened to presentations by Blumenthal and a Nigerian expert, Professor Bamidele Solomon, Director General of the National Biotechnology Development Agency (NABDA), and participated in roundtable discussions on the pros and cons of biotechnology and its potential applications in agriculture, medicine, and other areas. Blumenthal pointed out that Nigeria has a good scientific and technical basis but lacks the legislative framework to attract investments that employ biotechnology, which will augment Nigeria's aspirations to achieve food security.

Engaging Trade Associations, NGOs, and the Media

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**¶13.** (SBU) Blumenthal and Solomon made presentations to trade and business representatives, state and local policymakers, NGOs, and the media at a forum organized by the Public Affairs Section in Lagos. Responding to a question on how Nigeria can protect itself from the adverse effects of biotechnology, Blumenthal pointed out the need "to enact biosafety legislation containing appropriate safety provisions." (Note: There is a biosafety bill with such provisions now before the National Assembly. End Note) Blumenthal noted that biotechnology has been in use for the past 13 years without a single known adverse environmental or health impact. He also noted that, globally, there are over two billion acres of farmland that employ biotechnology -- an area expanding every year, especially in developing countries. Nigerian speaker Solomon pointed out that seven Africa countries have biosafety legislation and are already employing biotechnology and reaping the benefits. He added that Nigeria has made a commitment to enact such a law by acceding to the Cartagena Protocol and has the capacity to regulate the application of biotechnology.

**¶14.** (SBU) Blumenthal and Solomon were also keynote presenters at the monthly Open Forum on Agriculture Biotechnology in Africa (OFAB). (Note: The OFAB is a forum that accesses applicable technology, including biotechnology, to increase the productivity of African farmers and facilitates the flow of information from the scientific community to policymakers. End Note) Over 100 participants,

including senior GON policymakers and leading Nigerian scientists, participated in the discussion resulting in a consensus that Nigeria needs biosafety legislation to fully harness the benefits of biotechnology.

¶5. (SBU) Blumenthal also met with the President of the Senate and his senior staff as well as senior aides of the Chairman of the House Committee on Agriculture to advocate for the passage of the pending biosafety law. Blumenthal and Solomon were also interviewed by the Nigerian Government's National Radio and Television services and the Africa Network Television.

A Coordinating Committee on Biosafety Established

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¶6. (SBU) The Mission used the opportunity of Blumenthal's visit to facilitate a GON interagency meeting on biotechnology involving the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Science and Technology, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the National Biotechnology Development Agency. The participants formed an Interagency Biosafety Coordinating Committee to advocate for the passage of the pending legislation. The biosafety bill, drafted in part through USAID funding, has been in the legislative process since 2002 but has been in limbo for the past seven years due to lack of a strong GON advocate. Early this year, the Chairman of the House Committee on Agriculture introduced the legislation as a private bill.

¶7. (SBU) Comment: The biotechnology outreach program has improved the awareness of policymakers, legislators, scientists, and civil society on biotechnology and the need for a biosafety law for its safe application. The Mission will continue to engage with key GON

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interlocutors and advocate for the passage of a science-based biosafety law consistent with international norms. End Comments.

¶8. (U) This cable was coordinated with Consulate Lagos.

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